Yarra III

The time frame of this story is some 6 years after the arbitary cut off “history date” of 1955, but it was considered to be of likely interest level to the Journal’s readers.

By Chief RE Ray Brown

HMA Ships *Yarra* and *Parramatt*a were among the first RAN ships to be fitted with the powerful new Dutch made Long Range Air Warning Radar, type LWO 2, when these ships were commissioned in 1961. LWO 2 had an exceptionally large Radar aerial, which was fitted to the very top of the foremast on both ships. This caused the ships to ‘roll on wet grass”. On later ships, the aerial was installed much lower to improve stability.

With such a powerful Radar, it was not realised what the ramifications would be when we ‘let it loose on the unsuspecting populace’. To date there had been no negative or positive feedback from the public about Radar testing and use. This was about to change. Following are some of the complaints received.

* The Gore Hill ABC studios: Radars upsetting the recording facilities
* RAAF: LWO 2 Radars had disrupted one of the RAAF’s major exercises when Yarra & Parramatta were operating off the mid northern NSW coast.
* Crew: Scared hell out of sailors when there was terrific noise generated by much arcing and sparking in the waveguide run from the transmitter to the aerial.
* Newspapers: Navy ‘death ray’ fears. Strange beams of light at night. Budgerigars going crazy, telephones ringing, nosebleeds and spine tingling. Electrical appliances at a Wooloomooloo community centre ‘acting strangely’. This story backed up by a soccer star who said Radar testing affected his hi-fi equipment and set off as many as 3 car alarms simultaneously.
* Independent MP Clover Moore used the publicity to champion the cause for those believing in death rays. In a letter to the Defence minister Kim Beazley, Clover Moore stated that the Navy freely emits millions of megawatts of focussed pulse-powered radio energy, which slams straight through brickwork of residential bulding and human tissue. Moore also reported being told by a dockyard employee that when the Radar was tested during the day, data in the Defence Force Credit Union computer was erased. In another letter to Defence minister Beazley, Moore claimed that memories of VCRs, phones and remote control answering machines were being wiped.
* Other complaints included interruption to TV and radio reception, car and indoor alarms being activated.

A Navy spokesman admitted that some Radar tranmissions did interfere with some electrical and electronic appliances, and that to minimise inconvenience, test transmissions would be carried out between midnight and dawn, specifically to eliminate interferrence with Channel 2 ABC transmissions. As well, the dummy load facility was invoked, which almost entirely stopped external transmission.